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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Federal Union of European Nationalities, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Please recycle

The problems of the Turks in Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese

The Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) is deeply concerned about the situation of the Turks in Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese. FUEN visited the islands of Rhodes (Rodos in Turkish) and Kos (İstanköy in Turkish) on 27-30 August 2015 and conducted consultations with Turks living in those two islands and consulted civil society organizations.

The presence of the Turks living in Greece is limited to Western Thrace and approximately 6,000 Turks living mostly in Rhodes and Kos. Rhodes and Kos were occupied by Italy in 1912, and these islands were left to Greece according to the Paris Treaty in 1947. However, the Greek authorities do not accept the minority status of the Turkish community, claiming that the Dodecanese were under the administration of Italy when the Lausanne Peace Treaty was signed in 1923.

After the Greek authorities took over the administration of the Dodecanese, they passed a new act numbered 517/1947 and declared that the Italian acts and regulations were valid as long as they did not contradict to this new act. The Italian acts and regulations had determined the rights and responsibilities of the Islam community and the administration of foundations, described their administrative organization in detail, and organized a triple system consisting of the Turkish community, the Turkish foundations, and the Office of Mufti in which they could control each other.

However, after 1965 the Greek authorities gradually limited the implementation of these acts, and regulations, which were also called "The Law of the Dodecanese". The Turkish community living on these islands were then deprived of most of their basic human rights which they are entitled to as much as other Greek citizens.

The problems of the Turks in Rhodes and Kos were discussed in the meetings of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in 2012 and in the beginning of 2013 and resolutions were sent to the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Council (PACE). In this respect, a report titled "The situation of the Greek citizens of Turkish descend in Rhodes and Kos" prepared by Swiss Deputy Andreas Gross, member of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, was accepted by the Assembly on March, 9th, 2012.

In this report the following expectations of the Turks are stressed;

- To protect the Turkish identity of the people living in Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese,
- To join the administration of the Turkish foundations on the islands,
- To run the Office of Mufti freely,
- To teach and learn Turkish and Islam Religion at schools,
- To open the closed mosques to the Muslim Turkish worshippers,
- To regain Greek citizenship (For the Turks called the Citizens of the Dodecanese, who were deprived of citizenship)

The Problem of Citizenship

Following the Second World War, Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese were left to Greece in 1947. The Turks, who had to leave Rhodes and Kos after 1950, were forced to sign a document stating that they would not return to their homes. The remaining Turks in Rhodes and Kos couldn't leave the islands for a long period for fear that they would be deprived of Greek citizenship. These Turkish people had to go to the Foreigners Department of the Greek Consulate to obtain a return visa to Greece. They were allowed to leave the island for only 30 days. Also, the Turks, who were defined as the Citizens of the Dodecanese could leave their islands with a passport valid for five years. If they did not return their islands in five years, they were deprived of the Greek citizenship. Thousands of Turks who demanded to lengthen the validity period of their passports were refused and their passports were taken back and they were informed that they lost their citizenship. Furthermore, the Turks who still had the Greek Citizenship were not given new identity cards by informing them their registration documents were lost when they applied to the Municipality of Rhodes.

The right to learn one's mother tongue

The Turkish children were taught Turkish until 1972, when the name of one of the remaining Turkish schools teaching Turkish, the Süleymaniye Madrasah, was changed to the Thirteenth City Primary School. Since then there have been no Turkish and Islam Religion lessons for the Turkish children in Rhodes, Kos and the Dodecanese. Today the Turkish children, who attend the Greek schools, can speak a little Turkish. Also, Turkish people are discriminated against when they seek jobs in the public sector.

Turkish Cultural Heritage Inherited from the Ottoman Turks

The Turkish community is not allowed to repair and restore the historical buildings and monuments, they are deliberately left to the destruction of time. An example of this policy is the famous Süleymaniye Madrasah in Rhodes, which was built in 1878 to give the primary, secondary, and high school education to the Turkish children. The Greek Government closed the Süleymaniye Madrasah on the grounds that it would uncover the old St. John Church under it. The Süleymaniye Madrasah, in fact belongs to the Evkaf (The Turkish Muslim Foundation) but given to the Ministry of Culture.

The mosques in Rhodes are closed and today only the İbrahim Paşa Mosque is open. When Turkey demanded the Greek Government to open the Süleymaniye Mosque to the Muslim Turks in Rhodes, the Greek authorities claimed that the Mosque could not be opened as it was regarded and labeled as a piece of world historical heritage by UNESCO. Recently, the restoration process has been completed and Süleymaniye Mosque was opened to the Turks on the Holy Sacrifice Day. However, the local authorities informed that the Mosque would be a museum.

Similarly, Ali Hilmi Paşa Mosque was restored by the Municipality of Rhodes to be used as Cyprus House. Also, the Mufti's House in Murat Reis Külliyesi (a complex of religious buildings) was left to the destruction of time and the local authorities began to build a conservatory building in front of Murat Reis Külliyesi.

The Problem of Foundations

After the invasion of Rhodes, Italy planned to administer the real estate of Evkaf by means of a commission. After Greece took over the islands from Italy in 1947, the Greek Government passed an act numbered 517/1917. According to that act, on condition that they were legal, the acts and regulations which were in force at that time would be valid until they were replaced by new ones. Then, Greek Government promoted a government representative to inspect and control the administration of Turkish Muslim foundations.

After the death of the President of the Turkish community, Sadettin Nasuhoğlu, in 1965 some valuable works of art and the real estate of the Turkish community and the Turkish foundations were taken from the Turkish community by forcing them to sell or donate them to the Greek people or organizations.

According to a regulation, which was called Katalipsis, it was announced that the property and the real estate, which would not be registered to the Cadastre Office in ten years, would be given to the Treasury Office. Under this regulation the properties and the real estate which belonged to the Turks have been plundered and the problem of foundations has not been solved so far.

Today, the real estate tax- rate, which the Turkish foundations in Rhodes and Kos have to pay, is 0.6 %. This is the same with any other business organizations.

The Religious Rights

The religious rights of the Turks in Rhodes and Kos have been vulnerable to interventions. First, the Italian administration abolished the Office of Kadı (The Religious Judge) with a regulation and accepted the Office of Mufti as the only religious representative of the Turkish community on the islands.

After 1947, the Greek administration forced the teachers whose salaries were paid by Evkafı Mektebiye (school foundation) to become government officers and started education in Greek in Turkish Schools. In 1972, the Greek Authorities closed all Turkish Schools on the islands and forbade Turkish Education and religious lessons. Today, the

Turks who attend the public schools in Greece are exempted from Religion lessons. However, they are prevented from learning their own religion, Islam.

The elected Müfti in Western Thrace sent several religious officers to work in the İbrahim Paşa Mosque especially in the months of Holy Ramadan until 2012. In this way, the Turkish community could come together and protect their religious and national identities. However, the Imam performing his duty in this mosque was dismissed. The Turkish community was not allowed to invite Imams from the Western Thrace and Turkey even in the months of Ramadan.

The only mosque open to Muslim Turkish people in Rhodes is the İbrahim Paşa Mosque. The Süleymaniye Mosque closed in 1978 is only open to the Muslim worshippers on Ramadan and Holy Sacrifice days since 2010. In Kos, only the Germe Mosque is open to the Muslim worshippers. The Defterdar İbrahim Paşa Mosque, which is in the center of Kos, is open to the Muslim Turkish worshippers only on Fridays under the supervision of the imam appointed by the Greek authorities.